

THE MODERN SPANISH

**BREYER**

AND

**ZAITSEV**

**SYSTEMS**



**VASSILIOS KOTRONIAS**

FOREWORD BY ALEXEI SHIROV

# **The Modern Spanish Breyer and Zaitsev Systems**

**Vassilios Kotronias**

**Foreword by  
Alexei Shirov**



**2020  
Russell Enterprises, Inc.  
Milford, CT USA**

The Modern Spanish  
Breyer and Zaitsev Systems

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**1.e4 e5 2.♗f3 ♗c6 3.♖b5 a6 4.♖a4 ♗f6 5.0-0 ♖e7 6.♞e1 b5 7.♖b3 d6 8.c3 0-0 9.h3 ♖b7 10.d4 ♞e8!? 11.♗bd2 ♖f8 12.a4!? h6 13.♖c2 e×d4 14.c×d4 ♗b4 15.♖b1 c5 16.d5 ♗d7! 17.♞a3! c4! 18.♞ee3!?**

(a) 18...g6 19.a×b5 a×b5	316
(a1) 20.b3	316
(a2) 20.♞xa8!?	316
(b) 18...♗c5!	316
(b1) 19.a×b5	318
(b2) 19.b3!?	318

**1.e4 e5 2.♗f3 ♗c6 3.♖b5 a6 4.♖a4 ♗f6 5.0-0 ♖e7 6.♞e1 b5 7.♖b3 d6 8.c3 0-0 9.h3 ♖b7 10.d4 ♞e8!? 11.♗bd2 ♖f8 12.a3**

(a) 12...♗d7	322
(a1) 13.♖a2	322
(a2) 13.♖c2!	322
(b) 12...g6	322
(b1) 13.d5!?	322
(b2) 13.♖a2!	322

**1.e4 e5 2.♗f3 ♗c6 3.♖b5 a6 4.♖a4 ♗f6 5.0-0 ♖e7 6.♞e1 b5 7.♖b3 d6 8.c3 0-0 9.h3 ♖b7 10.d4 ♞e8!? 11.♗bd2 ♖f8 12.a3 h6!?**

(a) 13.♖a2 ♗b8 14.♗b3 ♗d7	
15.♗c2 c5	331
(a1) 16.b3?!	331
(a2) 16.d5	331
(b) 13.d5 ♗b8! 14.♗h2 ♗bd7 15.♗f3 c6 16.d×c6 ♖×c6 17.♗g4	
(b1) 17...♗e7	331
(b2) 17...♗c5!?	331

**1.e4 e5 2.♗f3 ♗c6 3.♖b5 a6 4.♖a4 ♗f6 5.0-0 ♖e7 6.♞e1 b5 7.♖b3 d6 8.c3 0-0 9.h3 ♖b7 10.d4 ♞e8!? 11.♗bd2 ♖f8 12.a3 h6!?**

(a) 13...d5	332
(a1) 14.e×d5!?	332
(a2) 14.d×e5!	332
(b) 13...g6 14.b4!	342

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(b1) 14...a5?!	342
(b2) 14...♖b8!	342

**1.e4 e5 2.♟f3 ♟c6 3.♙b5 a6 4.♙a4 ♟f6 5.0-0 ♙e7 6.♞e1 b5 7.♙b3 d6 8.c3 0-0 9.h3 ♙b7 10.d4 ♞e8!? 11.♟bd2 ♙f8 12.a3 h6!? 13.♙c2 ♟b8**

(a) 14.b4 ♟bd7 15..♙b2	344
(a1) 15...♟b6	344
(a2) 15...a5!?	344
(b) 14.b3 ♟bd7 15..♙b2	344
(b1) 15...♞b8	344
(b2) 15...g6!	344

<b>Index of Main Games</b>	<b>350</b>
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# Foreword

“When I was young and my life was an open book...” Perhaps my life was, but my Ruy Lopez definitely wasn't! In fact, I couldn't open any book about it because, for some reason, the opening books in the late Soviet Union were not even close to the great quality of other chess literature (games collections for instance) and books on the Spanish were even below that standard, in my opinion. Which is easy to explain – the Spanish Opening is so complicated that no one really knew how to even write about it. So, my generation was only left with some great annotations of a couple of Karpov's wins over Andersson, and later with some of Kasparov's games.

Vassilios Kotronias was my second in Linares 1993, and he may remember that although I tried to combine 1.e4 and 1.d4 openings, in fact I really struggled with 1.e4 because I didn't feel prepared in the Ruy Lopez at all. And once again, because of the complexity, we couldn't really fix that, so I mostly (and fortunately successfully) played 1.d4 in that tournament.

Only in 1995, when I was 23-years old and had already been in the top ten for three years, did I finally force myself to employ the Ruy regularly. Well I had to – I was waiting to receive a Spanish passport.

So, when I was 7, I read that the fourth world champion Alexander Alekhine recommended that young players play the Spanish... but it was 16 years before I started to play it. And nowadays we can see a similar picture – youngsters play a lot of Italian or Scotch Games, but not the Spanish that much.

And the main point is that Ruy Lopez in general, and concrete lines in particular, should be explained well. Only then does one start to understand its nuances properly and play it with both colors.

Still, to explain the entire opening, you would need many volumes. I believe that Vassilios has the right approach – explaining the main ideas and nuances one by one. And his choice is very interesting – the Breyer and Zaitsev Variations are

## *The Modern Spanish*

different but many ideas, such as placing bishops on b7 and sometimes g7, the knight going to d7 back from c6 via b8 and so on, are similar. So, starting from that certain similarity, one can perceive and comprehend both strategical and concrete ideas, and sometimes even tactical nuances, much better.

Kotronias clearly states that his new book is for both general Ruy Lopez players with White and those who are still searching for their line in that opening with Black. The games are very carefully selected. When studying them you will not feel that you already know the refutation of Black's setup or a clear defense against White's advances. But you will still learn how to do both things better, regardless of which side of the board you are on. When you go to play your game after having read Vassilios' book, you will not have to struggle to remember tons of variations but instead, you will feel your creativity improve. And this is what we love in chess – the ability to think for yourself while still being guided by a wise specialist.

Vasilios Kotronias has managed to not only teach us (myself included) some important theory and practice of the Breyer and Zaitsev Systems, but also broaden our horizons to our approach to chess in general. His explanations are calm and clear and the lines he provides are logical and concrete. This new book is aimed for all ages and chess levels. Welcome to the fascinating world of Breyer and Zaitsev!

Alexei Shirov  
July 2020

# Introduction

A few years ago, I started writing a huge book on the Spanish, but the twisted horns of fate decided that it would never appear as a complete illustrative 100-game work, which was the way I had intended it to be. Instead, I ended up writing a work on the Breyer and Zaitsev Variations with twenty illustrative games, which I hope readers will not consider any less of an important achievement.

This book is not a repertoire from White's point of view. It is an objective presentation of two excellent opening variations for Black, from which I believe players sitting on either side of the board may profit. The play is strategically complex and tactically rich and will improve you as both players and connoisseurs of the game. Or at least this is my secret aspiration.

As it happens with almost every chessplayer, I have my childhood chess heroes and also those of my adult chess life. My childhood hero was the inimitable Robert Fischer and my adult era hero was my contemporary Garry Kasparov, a player of brilliant style and talent, with whom unfortunately I never had the chance to cross swords over the board.

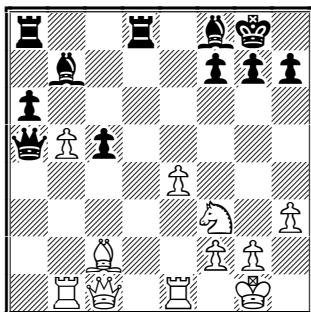
Quite interestingly, two fantastic games that inspired me to become a 1.e4 player were played by them and they were played precisely in the two systems this book discusses. You may witness these two games below. I must tell you that the positions in the diagrams will never be erased from my memory. They are gems of nice, harmonious attacking play.

Let us first begin with the tenth game of the 1972 Fischer-Spassky world championship match.

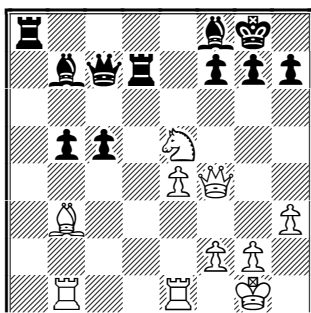
## Robert Fischer – Boris Spassky Reykjavik 1972

1.e4 e5 2.♟f3 ♞c6 3.♞b5 a6 4.♞a4 ♟f6 5.0-0 ♞e7 6.♟e1 b5 7.♞b3 d6 8.c3 0-0 9.h3 ♞b8 10.d4 ♞bd7 11.♞bd2 ♞b7 12.♞c2 ♟e8 13.b4 ♞f8 14.a4 ♞b6 15.a5 ♞bd7 16.♞b2 ♟b8 17.♟b1 c5 18.bxc5 dxc5 19.dxe5 ♞xe5 20.♞xe5 ♟xe5 21.c4 ♟f4 22.♞xf6 ♟xf6 23.cxb5 ♟ed8 24.♟c1 ♟c3 25.♟f3 ♟xa5





26. ♖b3!! a×b5 27. ♗f4 ♜d7 28. ♘e5 ♖c7

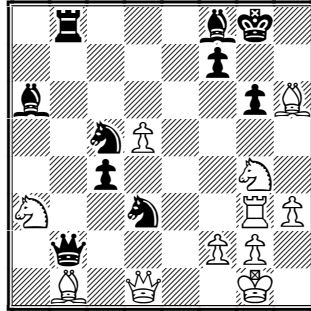


29. ♜bd1! ♜e7 30. ♗×f7+ ♜×f7 31. ♗×f7+ ♗×f7 32. ♘×f7 ♗×e4 33. ♜×e4 ♗×f7 34. ♜d7+ ♗f6 35. ♜b7 ♜a1+ 36. ♗h2 ♗d6+ 37. g3 b4 38. ♗g2 h5 39. ♜b6 ♜d1 40. ♗f3 ♗f7 41. ♗e2 ♜d5 42. f4 g6 43. g4 h×g4 44. h×g4 g5 45. f5 ♗e5 46. ♜b5 ♗f6 47. ♜e×b4 ♗d4 48. ♜b6+ ♗e5 49. ♗f3 ♜d8 50. ♜b8 ♜d7 51. ♜4b7 ♜d6 52. ♜b6 ♜d7 53. ♜g6 ♗d5 54. ♜×g5 ♗e5 55. f6 ♗d4 56. ♜b1 1-0

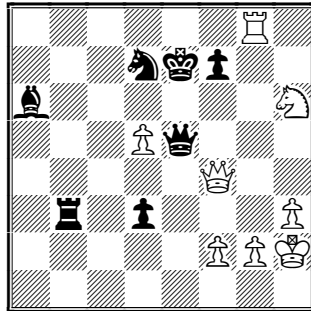
And now the next game, also from a world championship match.

Garry Kasparov – Anatoly Karpov  
London/Leningrad 1986, Game 16

1.e4 e5 2.♘f3 ♘c6 3.♗b5 a6 4.♗a4 ♘f6 5.0-0 ♗e7 6.♜e1 b5 7.♗b3 d6 8.c3 0-0 9.h3 ♗b7 10.d4 ♜e8 11.♘bd2 ♗f8-12.a4 h6 13.♗c2 e×d4 14.c×d4 ♘b4 15.♗b1 c5 16.d5 ♘d7 17.♜a3 c4 18.♘d4 ♗f6 19.♘2f3 ♘c5 20.a×b5 a×b5 21.♘×b5 ♜×a3 22.♘×a3 ♗a6 23.♜e3 ♜b8 24.e5 d×e5 25.♘×e5 ♘bd3 26.♘g4 ♗b6 27.♜g3 g6 28.♗×h6 ♗×b2



29. ♖f3!! ♜d7 30. ♙xg8 ♚xg8 31. ♜h2 ♞b3 32. ♙xg8 ♜xg8 33. ♜f4 ♚xa3  
 34. ♜h6 ♜e7 35. ♞xg6 ♜e5 36. ♞g8+ ♜e7



37. d6+! ♜e6 38. ♞e8+ ♜d5 39. ♞xe5+ ♜xe5 40. d7 ♞b8 41. ♜xf7 1-0

Closing this short foreword, I wish those advocating the white side to follow in the footsteps of Fischer and Kasparov and those defending Black to have the energetic drive and stamina of, among others, Karpov, Carlsen and Spassky.

Vassilios Kotronias  
 Athens, July 2020

(2) The ...f7-f5, strike, preceded by ...h6-h5, can be a good back-up method to challenge the same structure.

(3) In the fluid central positions analyzed in the notes of this game, where White was resorting to b3, the maneuver ...h6-h5-f4-e6 was a useful way to battle White's central superiority.

(4) Last but not least, nuances that can hamper the opponent's plan. 15...b6! is a striking case of such a nuance as Black is tempting his opponent's pawn to a5 to prevent his intended d2-b3-a5. The fact that Black is willing to invest two tempi to achieve this can be paradoxical to the uninitiated, but in fact this displays how deep the Breyer can be. With all these in mind, I think it is time to go to the next game.

## Game 5

Shirov –Kamsky

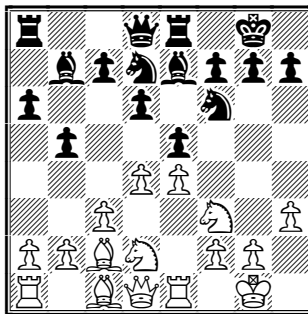
Khanty Mansiysk WCUP 2007

The game that follows was played at the Khanty Mansiysk World Cup in 2007. Two of the strongest players in the world crossed swords in a topical line of the Breyer, and I think these players need no introductions from me. Although the result of the game was not a decisive one, I think it deserves close study from the readers for the original pawn structure it entails.

Besides the instructive game itself, I have made sure that many other games found their way into its "suburbs." This is not supposed to be a book strictly about theory, but rather one that may arm you with ideas, so I did not cover everything. However, I think that when you read this text, you will be richer both strategically and theoretically. Both sides can deviate at various points

before entering the main lines, and some of these lines will help you understand the entire strategy for both sides.

1.e4 e5 2.f3 c6 3.Bb5 a6  
4.Qa4 f6 5.O-O Qe7 6.Re1 b5  
7.Qb3 O-O 8.h3 d6 9.c3 b8 10.d4  
11.Bd2 Qb7 12.Qc2 Re8



13.f1

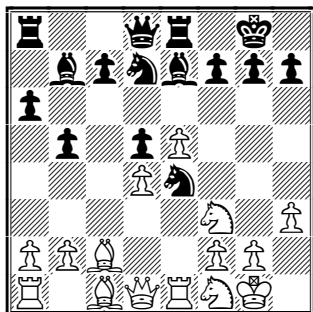
Finally we come to the most popular move, preparing to switch the knight to g3 for active operations. From that square, the knight also adds to the much needed defense of the e4-pawn.

13...Qf8

Freeing the e-file for the Re8 is the consistent follow up. Retreating the bishop is the prelude to more central pressure, and perhaps it can find a home on g7 later on, to put more pressure on the long diagonal. Before proceeding to the game though, I decided to take a look at early black tries to strike at the center with ...d6-d5. I originally thought these lines were complete rubbish, but then again, they are part of chess history and perhaps refuting them over the board is not so easy. So, here we go.

Completely pointless is 13...exd4?! 14.cxd4 d5 15.e5 e4, as the knight can be immediately exchanged:

## The Modern Spanish



16. ♖3d2! This is the most accurate.

Instead, 16. ♖1d2!? is not so clear in view of 16... ♗f5! 17. ♖b3 (after 17. ♗g4!?, both 17... ♗g6∞ and 17... ♗f8!?) 18. ♗×f5 ♗×f5 19. ♖×e4 d×e4 20. ♖×e4 ♖×e4 21. ♗×e4 ♗f8! ⇒ are playable options for Black, with White having no advantage in either case) 17... a5 ⇒ and Black does not appear to have any particular problems as he is about to maneuver the ♖d7 to e6, an excellent blockading square.

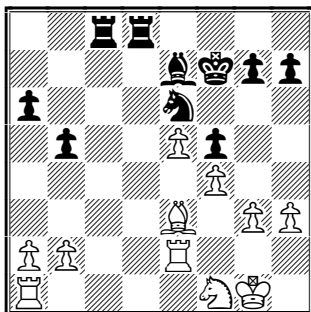
16... c5!?

The only logical idea for Black is to sacrifice a pawn here.

16... ♖×d2 17. ♖×d2 c5 18. ♖e3± gives White a free hand on the kingside. After 18... ♗g6, trying to prevent the knight invasion to f5, White has 19. ♖g4± with a virulent attack on the dark squares.

17. ♖×e4 d×e4 18. ♖×e4 ♖×e4 19. ♗×e4 ♗f5! 20. ♗e2 c×d4 21. ♗×d4 ♖c5 22. ♗×d8 ♗e×d8 23. ♖e3 ♖e6 24. ♗f4 ♗ac8 25. ♗g3 ♗f7±/±. (D)

White is clearly better, with Black having just a few drawing chances in the ending in view of the light-square blockade. It is doubtful that with so many pieces White will not find a way to shake it and in any case the task ahead of him is rather pleasant.

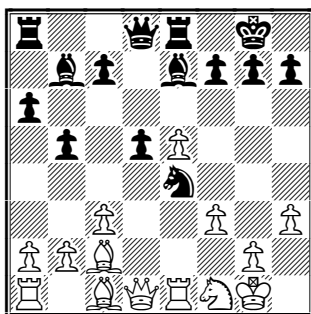


Another move I do not like for Black is 13... d5!?. It leads to a typical 4-3 kingside preponderance for White, where his attack is easy to plan and carry out while at the same time Black lacks serious counterplay:

14. ♖×e5! ♖×e5

14... ♖×e4? loses to the brilliant 15. ♗×e4! d×e4 16. ♖×f7! ♗×f7 17. ♖b3+ ♗f8 (17... ♗g6 18. ♗g4+ ♖g5 19. ♖g3+-) 18. ♗h5 ♖e5 19. d×e5 ♖d5 20. e6+-.

15. d×e5 ♖×e4 16. f3



Surprisingly this position was once considered one of the main lines in the Breyer. But that was the pre-computer era of course, where advantages had to be forged through endless wood pushing before, upon, and after the game. My main remark here is that it resembles an Open Spanish where the

## The Breyer Variation: Game 5

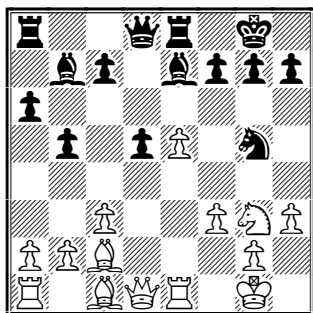
♙c8 has gone the wrong way, so the ♙c2 does not have an opponent on the b1-h7 diagonal. And this fact should guarantee White a pleasant plus.

16...♗c5

Keeping the option of moving the knight to d7 or e6, according to circumstance. Instead:

(a) The exchange of dark-square bishops that happens after 16...♗c5+ 17.♙e3 ♗xe3+ 18.♗xe3 ♗c5 only makes Black's life more difficult. After 19.f4 d4 20.cxd4 ♗e6 21.♖d3 g6 22.f5 ♗f4 (22...♗xd4 23.e6!±) 23.♖d1 c5 24.♖g4 ♖xd4 25.e6!+-, White had a winning attack in Plaskett-Tringov, Plovdiv 1984.

(b) 16...♗g5 17.♗g3! is also extremely tough for Black. Let us see a few lines after it:

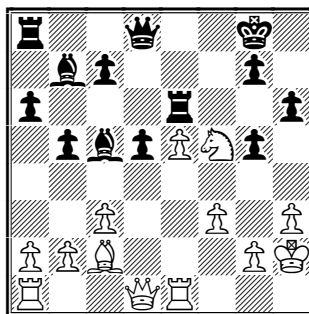


17...g6

An attempt by Baramidze to render the position playable. This is actually the last known example to me in which two strong players contested this line.

17...♗c5+ used to be the main line. However after 18.♗h2 f6 (18...♗f2 19.♙e2 ♗xg3+ 20.♗xg3±; 18...g6 19.f4 ♗e4 20.♗xe4 dxe4 21.♖e2 f5 22.b4 ♗a7 23.♙d1 ♖e7 24.♗b3+ ♗f8 25.a4 bxa4 26.♙xa4±) 19.♗xg5! fxg5 20.♖b1! h6 (20...g6 21.♗xg6 hxg6

22.♖xg6+ ♗f8 [22...♗h8 23.♗h5+-] 23.♗f5 ♙e7 24.b4!+-) 21.♖d1 ♙e6 22.♗f5, Black's weakened light squares lead to his demise:



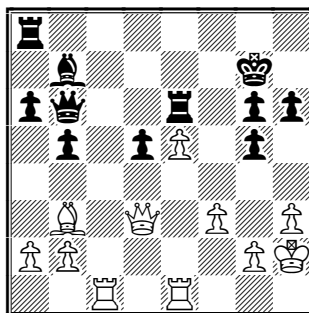
22...♖f8

22...h5? also led to a disaster after 23.♖d2 ♗f8 24.f4 gxh4 25.♖xh4 c5 26.♙e3 ♖c7 27.♙f1 ♙ae8 28.♗d6!+- in Lobron-Portisch, Wijk aan Zee 1985. It is rare to see the legendary Lajos outplayed like this, so this game speaks volumes about the problematic nature of Black's structure.

23.♖d3 g6 24.♗d4 ♗xd4 25.cxd4±

Black's position is riddled with weaknesses all over the place. This proved too much for the 10th world champion in Chandler-Spassky, BRD 1985. The instructive continuation was:

25...c5 26.dxc5 ♖xc5 27.♗b3 ♗g7 28.♙ac1 ♖b6



## The Modern Spanish

29.♖d2! ♖ae8 30.f4 gxf4 31.♗xf4  
 ♖f8 32.♗g3 ♖f7 33.♖cd1 ♗d8 34.♖e2  
 h5 35.♗e3 ♖f5 36.♖de1 d4 37.♗d2  
 ♖xe5?

37...♖e8 38.♖c2± was a better  
 defensive chance.

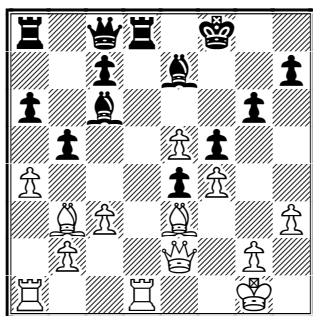
38.♖xe5 ♗d6 39.♖c2?!

39.h4!+- would have finished the  
 game at once.

39...♖xe5 40.♗f4 d3 41.♗xe5+  
 ♗xe5+ 42.♖xe5 dxc2 43.♖c5 ♖e4  
 44.♗g3 ♗f6 (44...♖d3 45.♖c3! b4  
 46.♖c5 ♗f6 47.♗f4 h4 48.♗e3 ♖f5  
 49.♗d2 g5 50.♖c4± offers no  
 salvation, but it was a better practical  
 chance) 45.♗f4 ♖f5 46.♗e3 ♗e6  
 47.g4! ♗d6 48.b4 h×g4 49.h×g4 ♖×g4  
 50.♖×c2 ♖e6 51.♗d4 and Black  
 resigned as he cannot avert invasion by  
 the White pieces.

Returning to Baramidze's 17...g6,  
 after 18.f4 ♖e4 19.♖xe4 dxe4 20.♗e2  
 f5 21.♖d1 ♗c8 22.a4!±, his hopes of  
 reaching equality were soon dashed. Let  
 us see why:

22...♖c6 23.♖b3+ ♗f8 24.♖e3 ♖d8



Thus far, Svidler-Baramidze,  
 Germany 2008. Here the accurate  
 continuation was:

25.♖×d8+ ♗×d8 26.♖e6!

Intending the follow up ♖a1-d1  
 and then g2-g4!.

This would have forced Black into  
 26...♗d3 27.♗×d3 exd3 28.axb5 axb5  
 29.♖×a8+ ♖×a8 30.♗f2 c5 31.c4!±,  
 when he is bound to lose a pawn and the  
 game. Svidler played instead the  
 immediate 25.g4!? and managed to win  
 after several inaccuracies.

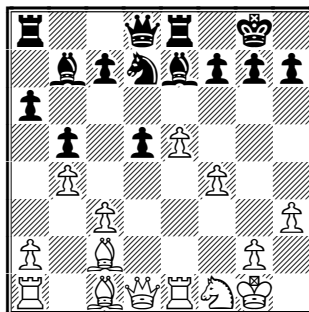
Let us return to 16...♖c5:

17.♖e3!

It is always good to prepare oneself  
 as well as possible for the upcoming  
 fight when the opponent has nothing  
 constructive to do. This is certainly the  
 case here.

A long time ago, when I was  
 analyzing the game of chess mostly  
 without engines, I had in my notes the  
 following continuation:

17.b4!? ♖d7 (17...♖e6 18.f4→) 18.f4



My evaluation was that White has  
 the advantage here. Today I do not have  
 the same opinion and I can explain that  
 with the experience I have acquired in  
 the meantime:

In a position where Black has no  
 counterplay at all, White throws in the  
 move b2-b4, giving his opponent a  
 lever to work up some action with  
 ...c7-c5. By today's standards this is  
 unnecessary and even rather  
 unacceptable.

18...c5

Of course Black should play this, as in this position there is no time to lose.

19.♖d3 ♜f8 20.bxc5 ♝xc5+ 21.♞e3

So far we have followed the game Greenfeld-Shvidler, Israel 1984. Here Shvidler gave the following analysis in his Chess Informant notes:

21...♞c8 22.♞d4

22.♞h2!? ♜c7 23.♞xc5 (23.♞g3 ♞xe3 24.♞xe3 g6 25.♞f1 ♞d7 26.♖d1 ♞h8 27.♞b3 ♞c5 28.♖d4 ♞e6 29.♖d2 ♞c5 30.♞c2 ♞cd8 also gives Black counterplay) 23...♜xc5 24.♞ac1 ♜f2 25.♖e3 ♖xe3 26.♞xe3 g6 27.♞b3 ♞c5 28.♞ed1 ♞d8 is an equal ending.

22...b4 23. ♞ab1!

At this point Shvidler stopped, thinking White is better.

However, the truth is that 22...♖h4! equalizes by exploiting the temporary weakness of the f4-pawn. For example, 23.♞e3!? ♜xf4 24.♞f1 (24.♞f5 ♞xe5 25.♞xc5 ♞xc5 26.♞e7+ ♞h8 27.♞f1 ♜xf1+ 28.♞xf1 ♞xe7=) 24...♖g5 /=.

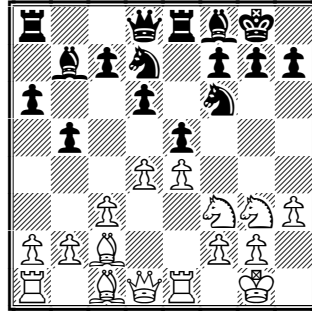
Returning to 17.♞e3!, after 17...a5 18.f4±, we can pause and take stock:

White has a mobile kingside mass, ready to threaten his opponent. He has no queenside weaknesses and thus Black lacks quick counterplay on that wing. If the black knight lands on e4, it will be exchanged immediately by its white counterpart, clearing the atmosphere in White's favor. Thus, we may conclude without further elaboration that White holds at least a slight advantage here.

**14. ♞g3 (D)**

**14...g6**

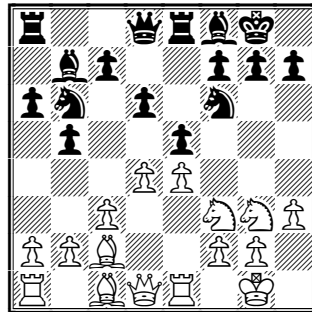
The universally accepted continuation. Black takes away squares from the ♞g3 and prepares to fianchetto his bishop if necessary. However, it is



not the only way to play the position. And here we come to get to know what I like to call the “rich suburbs” of this game:

The only line that is clearly better for White is 14...d5!? 15.♞xe5 ♞xe5 16.dxe5 ♞xe4 17.♞xe4 dxe4 18.♞f4± as it leads to a clean extra pawn for him, but the following alternatives should in no way be dismissed and are valuable reserves to the main line:

I first of all would like to bring to my reader's attention the move 14...♞b6!?



This tries to stop or slow down a2-a4, and has earned Ivan Sokolov quite good results against fellow super GMs. Although Black declares his intentions rather early, there is no clear path to an advantage for White. For example: